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—
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Mr. Kevin Sorenson

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•(1715)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC)): Order, please.

Ms. McDonough.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Calgary East, CPC): Mr. Chair, I have a problem from the time I looked at this agenda from the foreign affairs committee. Motion number two and motion number three were submitted a long time ago, before motion number one was.

The Chair: I know, but as you know, Mr. Obhrai—

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: What motion are we going to discuss now?

The Chair: The motion on....

Mrs. Angela Crandall (Clerk of the Committee, Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development): Madame Bourgeois's motion is the first because it was proposed at the last meeting.

The Chair: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Obhrai.

We will go to Madame Bourgeois's motion. You're right, we did begin debate on that at the last meeting and that's why we'll go to it first.

Madame Bourgeois, do you want to speak to your motion?

[Translation]

Ms. Diane Bourgeois (Terrebonne—Blainville, BQ): Yes, Mr. Chairman.

This motion is extremely important because it calls for committee members to be kept informed, but not just any way. It asks that we be informed by NGOs and experts about the rebuilding and aid strategy. In my opinion, it's very important that we be apprised of the reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan and that experts and NGOs — in short, those working in the field — brief us on developments.

Currently, we are hearing reports about National Defence operations and military casualties. However, we want to know exactly what is happening on the ground.

That's all I wanted to say, Mr. Chairman.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Bourgeois.

To that end, she has brought forward this motion.

Mr. Wilfert.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert (Richmond Hill, Lib.): Mr. Chairman, my understanding of the purpose of the study on democratic development is to talk about principles, how aid is done, how we develop democratic societies in various parts of the globe. This motion to me seems to be more focused on issues outside of democratic development. Obviously Afghanistan has had a presidential election, successfully. They have had an election of a national assembly, very successfully. In terms of the development, we could say how successful or not democratic roots are in Afghanistan, etc.

In my view, this motion is to analyze the present government's policy on Afghanistan and to do a study as to whether or not the assistance of the Government of Canada and the actions of what we used to call the three pillars—military, development, and diplomacy—are working. If in fact what we really want to do is an evaluation of government policy in Afghanistan, then I think we need to say that. If in fact, however, the issue is that we're looking at a broader evaluation of democratic development, we may want to look at a couple of particular states, and we can certainly do that for two or three, or we don't have to necessarily do an in-depth study on any particular state.

I just want to get a sense that this is the direction of this motion, because it seems to be different from what we originally suggested we were going to be doing.

•(1720)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Wilfert.

Mr. Obhrai, and then Madam McDonough and Madam Barbot.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Let me listen to everybody first before I make any comment or any suggestion. Let's see what ideas are coming forward.

The Chair: Madam McDonough.

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): If I understood Bryon Wilfert's comments, and I think I did, I agree with the sense of what he's raising. It doesn't seem as though the rest of the motion is really consistent with the broader study on democratic development, and in an attempt to be helpful, I'm just going to propose a friendly amendment that would remove "as part of its in-depth study of democratic development".

I do so not to suggest that there isn't of course an important element of democracy building involved in our commitment to Afghanistan, but rather I think it would perhaps be more accurate to see our decision to go ahead and hear from some witnesses about what's actually happening on the ground and so on. It is more in keeping with the ongoing responsibilities the foreign affairs committee has in order to deal with major pressing issues of the day. Yes, there's an element of democratic development, but I really think it's perhaps a bit confusing, and I'm trying to do that partly in response to the concerns Bryon Wilfert has raised.

I would propose that as a friendly amendment.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: What is your amendment?

The Chair: Remove, "as part of its in-depth study of democratic development".

Ms. Alexa McDonough: If I could say one other thing, I raised the proposal that we hold some hearings on Afghanistan several times in earlier meetings. There was an agreement reached, if I'm not mistaken, that we would attempt to do some joint meetings with the defence committee, also acknowledging that we want to look at the international aid aspect of what we're doing there as well.

So it's consistent with what we had discussed earlier and agreed upon.

The Chair: First, before I go to Madam Barbot, would you accept that as a friendly amendment, Madam Bourgeois?

[Translation]

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: Could I explain why I accept that, Mr. Chairman?

• (1725)

[English]

The Chair: You accept that. All right.

Madam Barbot.

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: Can I explain why I want to cut that?

[Translation]

I just want to say that I brought forward this motion in September. Our first order of business was an examination of democratic development. We did examine at considerable length the situation in Haiti and we were supposed to get to my motion sooner. That's why, even though the motion is still timely, we can delete this small part. Basically, I wanted us to be briefed on the situation.

At the time, we were hearing reports of soldiers dying in Afghanistan. The talk was always about reconstruction. What exactly was meant by reconstruction? That was the aim of my motion?

I don't have a problem with deleting this bit, for the sake of clarity.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Bourgeois.

Madam Barbot passes. We'll go back to Mr. Obhrai, Mr. Patry, and then Mr. Wilfert.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Mr. Chair, I don't see that we have any problems with the friendly amendment. As the government has

stated on many occasions, we will talk about it. The Minister of Defence is coming, CIDA is coming, so it's a good thing to have.

Bernard Patry has already suggested two days when we could discuss this. It's an important issue that is going on, and I think the committee's responsibility is as you rightly mentioned. I don't see anything....

I have one little problem, and that is the joint meeting with the defence committee. What it will do—

A voice: It's not in the motion.

Mr. Obhrai: Didn't you just say that you would like to—

The Chair: She did, but it's not in the motion.

Ms. Alexa McDonough: It's not part of the motion. It's really the context in which I was proposing this.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: But I'm addressing the point you just raised, and my concern is that this is the foreign affairs committee. When you do a joint committee, then you have ten other people going over this thing, and we will lose what we want to do. We want the answers, so that's why a joint committee meeting is something that I'm not in favour of.

Otherwise I don't see any problem, and we have to discuss the Afghanistan issue. Just today in the steering committee, Mr. Patry allocated those days.

So it's in the context of cooperation.

Mr. Bernard Patry (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): I like your cooperation, Deepak.

I want to pinpoint that for me we're supportive because in a sense we are already doing this. In fact we're doing this study right now, and you're just asking to go deeper with Afghanistan.

Minister Verner is coming for the estimates. We could ask her questions tomorrow concerning this.

We have three slots already with the Minister of Defence and the other two meetings of two hours each, some time in November. We haven't decided who is going to come, because we don't know yet. We just decided this afternoon. Nothing stops us from having one minister and one NGO for an hour, but I don't know which NGO is directly involved, and the researcher needs to find out about this.

But I think it's already there for us. We have already accepted that we can study this and focus a bit on Afghanistan. But I don't want to do just a study on Afghanistan. It's an overall study, and we focus on Afghanistan. We have all the chances to do it, and we all agree on this.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: By taking out the part about the study of democratic development, it obviously indicates that we want to do a study on Afghanistan or—and I'm starting to hear a few things—we're going to use the existing time that we've set for updates on Afghanistan. Presumably, Mr. Chairman, the committee clerk would like to have a submission on the NGOs or others we would be having.

We need to have a very clear timeframe for what we're doing and what the objective is. If it's an update, is that what we're looking for? Are we looking to do a report?

At the same time, I wouldn't want to add anything to any slots that are open, because there aren't too many, if in fact the intention of the committee is to still do democratic development. If it is, I think we then have to be realistic, with a balanced approach in terms of how we're going to do that. If in fact we say that we want an update on the situation in Afghanistan, then we're simply going to use that time and put in the appropriate witnesses.

I would assume we would need to have a timeframe, Mr. Chairman, in terms of submissions to the clerk on who we're suggesting, and then I guess we'll go from there.

But I want to be clear that we're obviously doing two different things here.

The Chair: Yes. I should say that we have a fairly comprehensive list and a very broad list of possible people who may come.

• (1730)

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: Could you share that?

The Chair: Yes. In fact, it will be fully passed around here this afternoon, so that everyone has a chance to see the witnesses who are on the list. We're going to try to make sure we get a fairly good cross-section.

We weren't going to pass around the list of witnesses until the motion was done.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: I appreciate that. I only wanted to clarify the aims and objectives we're trying to establish here. Are we coming out with a report or are we simply going to...?

God help us if we're going to do a report. We can't get through Haiti.

The Chair: I don't think the intent of this motion is to do a report.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: Hopefully, if it is to simply get the information, that's fine. I don't have a difficulty with it.

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Patry.

Mr. Bernard Patry: I only want to point out to Bryon the fact that the first target for the two slots for the update on Afghanistan is really to understand what's going on there right now, from our soldiers, defence, foreign affairs, and probably CIDA. That's the first focus on this. But in that formula, we can have development and what's going on in development.

The Chair: Non-government.

Madam Bourgeois.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: That's what I want to know.

[*English*]

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: Maybe you'd like Alexa and me to come as witnesses, since we were both there. We may not say the same thing, but we might.

Mr. Bernard Patry: You invite us for lunch, and we'll discuss it.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: Okay. Alexa will be paying, so I'll be more than happy to.

The Chair: Madam Barbot.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Vivian Barbot (Papineau, BQ): Mr. Patry said what I wanted to say, namely that we're interested in what's happening at this particular point in time.

[*English*]

The Chair: All right. Is there anyone else?

We'll call the question. Is it agreed to as amended?

We don't have to go through it. It's a friendly amendment, and we accept the amendment.

(Motion agreed to [See *Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: Congratulations, Madam Bourgeois.

Mr. Peter Van Loan (York—Simcoe, CPC): Mr. Chair, we are at the end of the meeting time, and I have another commitment.

The Chair: Do we have time? It's 5:30.

Very quickly, Madam McDonough.

Ms. Alexa McDonough: We went partway there in the schedule of meetings that we adopted this afternoon, coming from the steering committee recommendations, which is that on the twenty-third, we've agreed to spend one hour hearing from John McKay on Bill C-293.

My intent in putting this motion forward is to reflect, I think, the important consensus. I know the parliamentary secretary, Deepak Obhrai, earlier referred to the fact that in matters of all-party consensus there is some real weight assigned to it and some real sense that we're serious about dealing with these matters. It's in that spirit that I am putting forward an urgent proposal that we really get on with dealing with Bill C-293.

I accept that this sense of urgency is reflected in the decision we made earlier to proceed, but I guess I'd like to propose a small amendment to expedite the matter. It may seem strange, but since I originally submitted this, we've actually taken a step in that direction. Can I make a friendly amendment to my own motion?

I think it's in the spirit of what we learned in the U.K. and in the Nordic countries. We have some real homework to do here to pull ourselves out of the embarrassment of being at—where are we?—0.34%. We know all of those countries are way ahead of where we are.

Anyway, I don't want to spend the time, so let me very briefly propose this.

Mr. Bernard Patry: What's your amendment?

The Chair: We're going to close this thing off in about five minutes.

Ms. Alexa McDonough: Let me take 30 seconds to propose the following amendment to the end: "the committee hold meetings if necessary, in addition to regularly scheduled meetings, to study Bill C-293, An Act respecting the provision of development assistance abroad." Delete "beginning the week of October 23", because we already made that decision today.

The Chair: Do you want to repeat that once and then we'll go to Mr. Obhrai?

Ms. Alexa McDonough: In the third line from the bottom after “meetings” to insert “if necessary, in addition to regularly scheduled meetings, to study Bill C-293, An Act respecting the provision of development assistance abroad.” In other words, strike the last line “beginning the week of October 23”.

• (1735)

The Chair: Period after abroad.

Mr. Obhrai.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Continuing in the spirit of cooperation we established today, and we are looking—

The Chair: We have to go on a trip, not a holiday together, but we have to go on a trip together more often.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: What I'm trying to say is that we know we have to do bills as mandated by Parliament, and there's no need at this time for your motion to be there, because we know we have to do it. But let's concentrate on what we are doing already: the Haiti report, the Afghanistan thing, and everything.

This is going to fit into the thing. I'm looking at this thing by not having our hands tied by any kind of promotion. Our hands are already tied by the Parliament of Canada saying this thing has to be given at that given time. That's why, Mr. Patry, when we were at the steering committee...we have a lot of slots during the month of November when we're going to do it.

My reluctance in supporting this is that I don't want to have our hands tied to do this thing, but we know we have to do it and that is why we have John McKay coming. We'll get a better picture, a better understanding of what the private member's bill is going to be. Then we will be able to make a decision to do that. That is why I'm having difficulty with this proposal.

The Chair: Mr. Obhrai, I hope you have no intention of coming here in January, or any time in December, to get that report there the first week we're back after our break. You're saying you're committed to time in November.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: As we're going down the road, we will have enough time to study that and see how it's going.

The Chair: I'm not coming back to do any in January.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Neither am I coming back.

Ms. Alexa McDonough: I know we need to cut it off, so can we just go ahead and have the question? I think we all understand the pros and cons.

The Chair: Mr. Wilfert.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: When I was parliamentary secretary, all legislation and all bills, whether government or private member's, took priority at committee. Therefore, we have already slotted it, and I would suggest we deal with it.

The Chair: Mr. Patry.

Mr. Bernard Patry: I just want to be fair to the government side. They agreed this morning and we agreed this afternoon to start with Bill C-293, even before we passed the motion. They agreed on this. That's a step. Now we say we agree that we start the day after. You say it's next week we're going to start this. We will know. One thing we're going to be sure of is that we have a slot in November and we have the majority on this side, and if the government doesn't want to do it we're going to force the government to do it by having some other meetings.

To me, this motion is irrelevant in the sense that you ask if it's a necessity, but we don't know if it's going to be a necessity. We could fit in our slots. To me, it's irrelevant to have such a motion. We are already going to start it next week. That means the government's intention is to go along with this. We have done it and we agree on this. To me, there's no way to have such a motion.

The Chair: All right. Are we going to call the question?

You can have the last word.

Ms. Alexa McDonough: If I could just wrap up, I don't want to be provocative, but it's been four decades since Canada said it was going to do this. I don't think it's inappropriate for us as a committee to reflect some appropriate sense of urgency and build on the consensus already achieved. That's my purpose, and I call the question.

The Chair: Hear, hear!

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: The meeting is adjourned.

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